

## Should a newly built highway need repair so soon?

Keep the sanctity of public money

IT is astonishing that a large segment of the expanded Dhaka-Chittagong highway, that overran time by six years, has fallen into a state of disrepair within months after its completion.

The project, which took four years to kick off after it was launched in 2006, has cost the taxpayers Tk 36 billion—more than twice the amount initially planned. Now, as deep ruts have developed in several portions of the highway, the road transport and bridge ministry has rushed into seeking a further Tk nine billion for its maintenance in the next five years. While the necessary repair works must commence forthwith, we are not aware if any experts have been engaged to determine what caused the damage in the first place. Since repair is merely a stop gap measure, unless the inherent faults are removed the road will be in need for constant repair.

Engineers and officials involved in the project are blaming “overloaded vehicles” for the ruts, which doesn’t wash. Firstly, shouldn’t the planners have worked out the load factor before the construction or expansion of the road? Secondly, such opinion has not been based on any expert inquiry. Thirdly, there is a machine to check overload. Was it in use? If not, why?

The construction process, we feel, has been shoddy at best. The project speaks of poor planning, unchecked use of sub-standard construction materials, and lack of strict oversight. And there are enough grounds to suspect gross misuse of public funds. That is what must be found out.

Public money is not there for profligate expenditure. There must be complete transparency and full accountability of every farthing of people’s money. And the government must make examples of all those who misuse state funds for filling their own coffers.

## Healthcare is beyond reach for most

Expand the capacity of public hospitals

ACCESS to healthcare is a basic right for every citizen. But for the poor it is a luxury they can ill afford. Public hospitals, while providing health care at subsidised rates, are not enough to meet the growing demand of poor patients. Not only do public hospitals lack adequate resources in terms of medical personnel, beds and equipment, in many cases corrupt practices in these institutions deprive even those patients that could have received proper care. Thus for many poor people the only option is to resort to private health care which is both expensive and sometimes unreliable.

The situation is especially grave when it comes to patients with chronic, serious diseases such as cancer, heart and respiratory disease. The cost of prolonged health care that may involve expensive treatment such as chemotherapy, regular diagnostic tests or continued medication, results in further impoverishment of poor patients. According to Bangladesh Health Accounts report, out-of-pocket expenditure (OOP) in Bangladesh is 67 percent of the total medical costs, the highest in South Asia. This is because the cases of chronic diseases continue to increase every year according to a study by icddr,b. Thus the cost of treating these diseases is also increasing, casting a heavy burden on the majority of Bangladeshis.

A major reform in the healthcare system is mandatory. Public hospitals have to be better equipped and their capacity expanded so that they can properly treat the rising number of patients. This will require a more diligent monitoring system to make them accountable, to stop unethical practices such as asking patients to buy medicine when it is supposed to be free. Private medical care also has to be regulated so that patients are not duped into paying unnecessarily high medical bills.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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### Make Dhaka a liveable city

Dhaka is not only the capital city of the country but also an important part of our history, politics, art, culture and literature. Dhaka has, however, become a city of many dangers and problems. Be it traffic congestion, waterlogging or mosquitoes, Dhaka’s problems know no bounds.

Dwellers dump waste materials and garbage into canals and drains. In the rainy seasons, the city is flooded with stinky water. Dhaka represents all that is wrong with our city planning and governance. The government must wake up before it’s too late to fix Dhaka’s problems.

Biplob Biswas, Faridpur

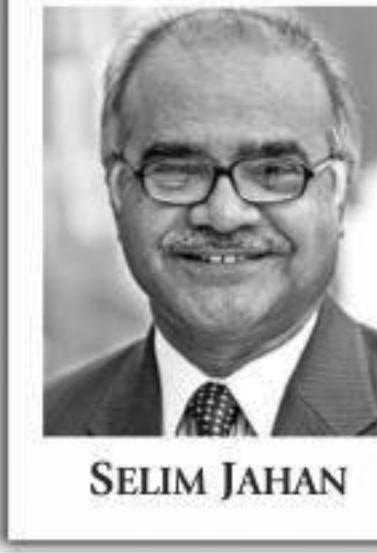
### Stars' fall from grace

Being Human is a charity organisation run by Salman Khan, a Bollywood film star. He has invested money, time and effort into it. To his fans, he is known as the big-hearted Khan. Then there is Steve Smith, whose biography is an encouraging one. His rise to Aussie captaincy can’t inspire others. Yet, both stars have fallen in the most disgraceful way.

It’s important to learn that crimes, be it tiny or large, have to be paid for. It’s necessary to stay focused on that understanding so that our good deeds are not undone.

Tohidul Islam Shoikot, Assistant Director, Bangladesh Bank

# RIP to GDP? Not So Fast



SELIM JAHAN

RECENTLY, David Pilling had a write-up entitled “Do we need to say RIP (Rest in Peace) to GDP?” The write-up draws on his latest book *The Growth Delusion* on which he recently spoke at the Oxford Literary Festival.

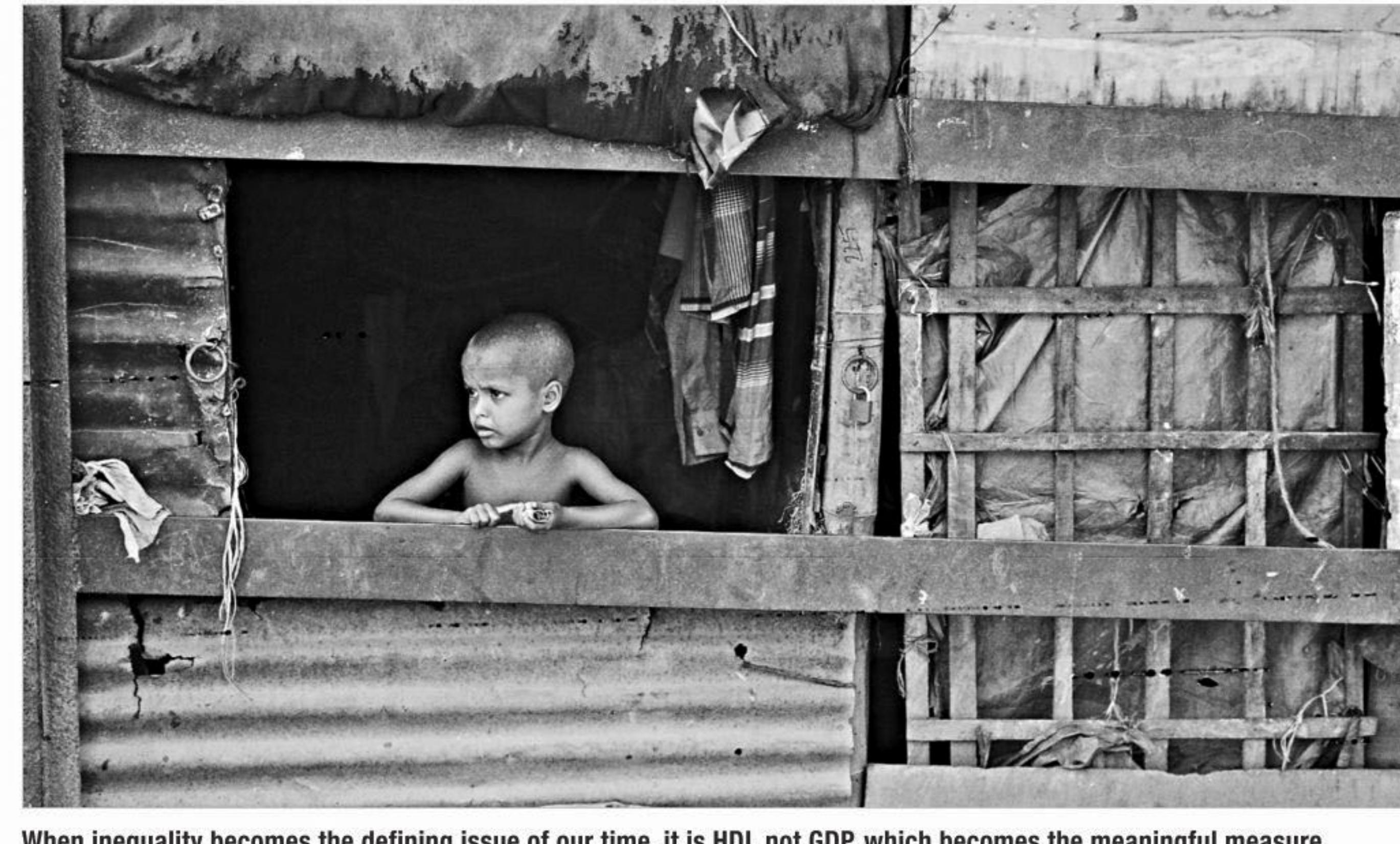
In the write-up, the author has made five important observations. I am in total agreement with all of them, except for the last one. His five observations are as follows: First, GDP (gross domestic product) was a World War II phenomenon, since planners needed to know how much of the GDP could be diverted to military efforts. Absolutely true. Second, we should never confuse GDP with well-being. Right on the dot. Third, for GDP, all production is equal. No doubt. Fourth, GDP measures flow income, but it has little to say about inequality. Who can disagree? Finally, time has come to let GDP rest in peace.

**Unlike GDP, HDI can take care of inequality in human well-being. When inequality becomes the defining issue of our time, it is HDI, not GDP, which becomes the meaningful measure of human well-being.**

Hmm, not so fast.

As a measure of development, GDP surely suffers on three fronts. First, it is a measure of material opulence, but not that of human well-being. Second, it treats every production equally without differentiating between good products (e.g. food) versus bad products (e.g. bombs). Third, GDP as such focuses on the total and not its distribution and, in that context, misses the phenomena of inequalities in human lives.

In 1990, in the context of the human development paradigm and as a measure for human well-being in terms of human capabilities and opportunities, we put



**When inequality becomes the defining issue of our time, it is HDI, not GDP, which becomes the meaningful measure of human well-being.**

PHOTO: SUDIPTA ARKA DAS/FLICKR

people at the centre of development and argued for development of the people, for the people and *by* the people.

Development of the people means human resource development; development for the people implies that the fruits of development would be translated in the lives of people in an equitable way; and development by the people points out the fact that people are not passive recipients of development outcome, but also an active agent in shaping it through participation. As a result, we came up with a measure of human well-being: the Human Development Index (HDI). It combined a long and healthy life (measured by life expectancy), knowledge (measured by education) and a decent standard of living (measured by income). HDI, a single number just like GDP, may be as vulgar as GDP, but not as blind as GDP to the broader aspect of human life.

One of the major shortcomings of GDP in terms of treating every production equally was brought out quite forcefully by the late Robert Kennedy as far back as March 14, 1968 when he spoke before the students of University of Kansas: “Too much and for too long, we seemed to have surrendered personal excellence and community values in the mere accumulation of material things. Our Gross National Product, now, is over 800 billion dollars a year, but that Gross

National Product, if we judge the United States of America by that, that Gross National Product counts air pollution and cigarette advertising, and ambulances to clear our highways of carnage. It counts special locks for our doors and the jails for the people who break them. It counts the destruction of the redwood and the loss of our natural wonder in chaotic sprawl. It counts napalm and counts nuclear warheads and armoured cars for the police to fight the riots in our cities. It counts Whitman’s rifle and Speck’s knife, and the television programmes which glorify violence in order to sell toys to our children. Yet the gross national product does not allow for the health of our children, the quality of their education or the joy of their play. It does not include the beauty of our poetry or the strength of our marriages, the intelligence of our public debate or the integrity of our public officials. It measures neither our wit nor our courage, neither our wisdom nor our learning, neither our compassion nor our devotion to our country, it measures everything in short, except that which makes life worthwhile.”

True, HDI does not contain all that Bobby Kennedy argued for, but definitely more meaningful things in life than what GDP reflects.

Unlike GDP, HDI can take care of

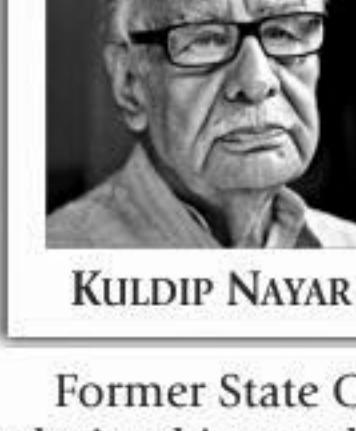
inequality in human well-being. When inequality becomes the defining issue of our time—as the top eight billionaires of the world possess the same wealth as the bottom half of the whole of humanity, with each billionaire being worth the same as 462 million people—it is HDI, not GDP, which becomes the meaningful measure of human well-being. Inequality-adjusted HDI accounts for inequalities in life expectancy, educational attainment and income, and can show how much of the HDI achievements are lost because of inequalities.

Yet, GDP remains relevant as a measure of the economy, as it counts economic activities, focuses on material things and traces economic progress. As a component of the HDI, it reflects a decent standard of living, an important aspect of human well-being. Income remains an important means to human development, but it is not an end in itself. It will continue to be a necessary condition, but not a sufficient condition for human well-being. So there is no need to say ‘RIP’ to GDP as argued by David Pilling, since we should not throw out the baby with the bath water.

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## Kashmiri Pandits' Dilemma

### BETWEEN THE LINES



KULDIP NAYAR

CHIEF Minister Mehbooba Mufti has said that the Kashmiri Pandits should visit their place of origin, meaning thereby the Valley. Her remark is like splashing salt on the wound. The Pandits were forcibly ousted from Kashmir in 1993. Their fault was that they were Hindus in the 90-percent Muslim Valley.

Former State Chief Minister Farooq Abdullah has admitted in a public statement that no Muslim from the Valley objected to their ouster. It is, indeed, true. He resigned from the position of chief minister which led to presidential rule in J&K. It was alleged that then governor Jagmohan was primarily responsible for facilitating the exodus of Kashmiri Pandits. The day he was appointed as governor, a large number of Kashmiri Pandits were forced to leave the Valley because of his

Islamists and militants. In 2010, the Government of Jammu and Kashmir noted that 808 Pandit families were still living in the Valley and that financial and other incentives put in place to encourage others to return there had been unsuccessful.

According to a Jammu and Kashmir Government report, 219 members of the community had been killed in the region between 1989 and 2004 but none thereafter. However, in July 2017, the Supreme Court refused to reopen 215 cases in which over 700 members of the Kashmiri Pandit community were killed in Jammu and Kashmir in 1989, citing the passage of time.

The appeal now by Chief Minister Mehbooba Mufti is a step in the right direction. During her appeal, following an interaction with Kashmiri Pandits in Delhi, she said, “Kashmiri Pandits should visit Kashmir (and) their younger generations should see where their roots really lie. We will make all arrangements. Whatever has happened in the past is unfortunate but



A protest rally by Kashmiri Pandits in Jammu.

the Pandits to return to the Valley. Most of their property is intact. The rest must be taken back from the people who have occupied it forcibly or otherwise.

I recall the Hurriyat leader, Syed Ali Shah Geelani, vehemently denying that it was a Hindu-Muslim question. At that time, the bug of fundamentalism had not bitten Geelani. He may not have changed his views. But he is conspicuous by his silence. He should have renounced his earlier stance: the Kashmiri Pandits are part of our culture and should not be mixed with the general Hindu-Muslim question. Geelani, in fact, told me that he had wrongly stated earlier that the Kashmiri Pandits’ question would be settled with the overall Kashmir dispute.

But Home Minister Rajnath Singh has unnecessarily given an opening to those who argue that Kashmir is an unfinished task of partition. They want the state to be divided on religious grounds. Somewhere they will also try in Pakistan to reemphasise their contention that the criterion of religion—on the basis of which India was divided—should be extended to Jammu and Kashmir.

Then Chief Minister Mufti Mohammad Sayeed had mooted an idea of having a separate area where the Kashmiri Pandits can safely reside. At present, 30,000 of them are reportedly in Kashmir while their total number is around four lakh. As long as Sheikh Abdullah was dominant in the affairs of Kashmir, he did not allow religion to play any role in politics. He would say that he opposed the state’s integration with Pakistan because Jammu and Kashmir was a secular state. He did not want to join an Islamic country because he preferred pluralism to communalism.

Even during the independence struggle, the Sheikh sided with Congress instead of the Muslim League which demanded a separate homeland for the Muslims. He paid the price for being critical of New Delhi’s policy of wanting a strong centre. After being detained for 12 years at Kodaikanal in the south, he stayed with the then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru to register that Nehru had realised his mistake of misjudging Sheikh when he demanded that the centre should only administer three subjects—Foreign Affairs, Defence and Communications—as was offered at the time of partition.

Sheikh’s famous statement was that the Kashmiris would not eat Indian wheat if it meant compromising their autonomous status. Sheikh’s faith in secularism was deep although he wondered whether India would stay pluralist in the long run.

Whether the Kashmiris realise it or not, they have greatly lost the services of trained people. The Pandits have gone to other parts of India and have found jobs because of their high qualifications. They are not likely to go back even if the state offers them equivalent jobs. In fact, Kashmir has lost the cream of youth which is technically well-equipped to help the state develop economically.

Yet Srinagar should make efforts to get the Pandits back because that will give them the secular image which they had enjoyed for decades. Lack of efforts on this front would only alienate the rest of the country where the Kashmiris are gainfully employed.

Kuldip Nayar is an eminent Indian columnist.

pro-Hindu stance. It was being alleged that security forces searched each and every house in Srinagar when hundreds of militants were found to be in possession of weapons. Most of them were arrested but during the operation, which led to the Gawkadal massacre, questions came to be raised on the role of the governor. Jagmohan, who was very close to Sanjay Gandhi, was also instrumental in forcefully destroying many slums in Delhi in the name of beautification.

The Kashmiri Pandits began to leave the Valley in greater numbers in the 1990s during the eruption of militancy, following persecution and threats by radical

now we will have to move forward,” she said.

In fact, she also urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi to take a leaf out of former Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee’s book and initiate dialogue with Pakistan. “I urge Prime Minister Modi to talk to Pakistan just like Vajpayee ji did. Neither are we nor is Pakistan in a condition to fight a war, both countries know now that if there will be a war, nothing will be spared. Both the nations will just lose everything,” she added.

I do agree with her because this is not a Hindu-Muslim question and should not be made into one. All political parties need to initiate steps which will enable